From Russia with Love

Waking dreams woke: Bons Baisers de Russie (From Russia With Love), Andrei, *Андрюша*.. If the last 5-10 years have taught me anything it is the need to embrace both the male and female archetypes to survive, raise, love, reproduce, and care for others..

James Bond and 'From Russia With Love' (1962) emerged a long time ago. That plot to steal a encoding/decoding a cryptographic device from the Soviets, and sell it back to the East while also exacting revenge. Assassians and lovers abound, cross-agents crossed-paths, and got entangled in dangerous spy-counteractions, bed-sheets and oriental locations. Oh! And Tatiana Romanova, the cipher clerk at the Soviet consulate in Istanbul, was the unwitting bait, and an enabling ‘love-interest’.. *Давайте*!

As the ‘man-ly’ stereotype of agent 007 was first famously represented by the shape and form of Scottish actor Sean Connery, one that I grew up watching and admiring, this essay reflection is personal, political. One that needs to be—and is—being re-written in a/this generation. The actor was not only recruited but also groomed for the early 007 films director Terence Young, himself son of a British Colonial Police Commissioner of Shanghai. The *Edinbra* -born Connery was wined and dined into the trans-national Gentleman of assumed privilege—potentially dubious—honour that we have come to know about: How to walk, how to talk, how to eat, how to be tailored, and we presume, how to flirt for the role. However, the charisma of the living man was also such that Alexander Fleming furthermore re-wrote the uncouth, rugged, physically attractive (and sexual) allure of the then young, muscular—famously former-milk-man—Sean Connery into the fictional Bond character, scripting in for Bond a Scottish father and a romantic location of birth: Glencoe, the symbolic glen and battlefield of Scotland's Highlands. He was, after all, one of the first visualisation of fictional alpha-male, a stylish spy, MI6 special-agent, a Cold War -era scrapper.. Beyond the law, intelligent, dangerous to know, shoots to kill, seductive, a womaniser. Manipulative, emotionally restrained, presumptious, incommunicado, his textual profile in books was complex, while the silver-screen version was.. Not*.

That a generation of Scottish, British -and by extension of soft and hard Empire reach- the global market of male imagination was encouraged by this profile, is not surprising either. The callousness and calculated ruthlessness of Irvine Welsh's character Simon 'Sick Boy' Williamson in Trainspotting (1993, film 1996), came with an amoral arrogance, of being better that the rest, was hard-wired with -or cleaved from- the image of James Bond, and by association with Sean Connery also, a local hero of making-it-big.. In the world, into shagging statistics and kills (of character). It may be considered self-depreciating to identify with him, but Scottish humour is particularly dark that way.

The #MeToo sexual harassment and abuse exposures of the past 5 years have thankfully also killed off the character, it's credit and value of the alpha-male over-reaching, grabbing, and gone amok. What is left are qualities that hopefully may still borrow some from Connery's image of the 1960s, but we are living in the soon 2020s. 60 years later. The returning horror-show of mid-20th Century ‘male-dom’ (and the shorthand for domination is used consciously here) of the West is a real thing, enabled by some politicians, spokespersons, celebrities, and sorry to write, but it seems true for me, retrograde authoritarians and fascists. It is also important that Women, Men, Trans, Queers and Feminists call out. And heterosexual, cis-gender White men, like myself, especially do need to call out.

Different cultures of the patriarchy, as they manifested and are remembered from the mid 20th Century, are good to keep in mind for comparative reference. This challenging issue is not playing out universally the same way in different places. Various culture wars are being fought over now contemporaneously.. Online, and in physical on-life encounters in homes and public spaces, such as streets, bars, beds, forums, cinema, books, and variously expansive 'blogs' in social media websites like this one.

The choice of Western (Europe & North American) film and film posters which accompany this comment, short and humble, weaves into view, at least in my mind, the mix of French and Russian archetypes of male (and female) imagination that are also struggling nowadays with Feminist and Queer re-appraisals of what it means to be a strong man, a powerful woman, under repressive powers and the subaltern desire to usurp that power <Swaggering doon the road wi milk crates in ma hands, that's whit Ah want tae dae wi it, metaphorically crash that power> I try my best to do no violence <Tae dump the virtual crates ower them blockheids> From here and now, in this calm way, I send solidarity.

There are massive issues untouched here. I suggest, in relation to trans-generational trauma, model male behaviours that have been suppressed. For example, in a Russian example of things, there is the problematic inherited prison and gulag orders within society which might be argued are behind the homophobia that has blossomed there, or the gendered language struggle and power-games in both France and Russia—but all romance and slavic language nations may be included—that, of course, are political. There is also the failure of Socialism (both in the 'East' and in the 'West') to actually emancipate women from socially-reproductive and domestic work, rather than double or triple it up. All of these issues needs serious unfolding in the imagination, then re-folded again in various ways, wrapping in contemporary, more appropriate ways of thinking. To get out of such a relational mess, we need to stay with the trouble, as Donna Haraway suggests, and recognise the historically-creased lines crossed.

While there is some value in discussing men's issues with men, some topics and some ages need a distinct starting space for beginning a conversation about a 'block' or, for example, an intimate health issue for that might be intimidating to speak of in other groupings.. I have my reservations about maintaining a gendered separation of issues. I am not enchanted by Robert Bly’s ‘Iron John’ as a way forward. Instead I want complexity of

perspective. Erwin Schrödinger dubbed entanglement in quantum physics to recognise that once interacted with each other, two particles cannot be described separately, and this links ‘ghost’ relations across time and space. Surely we have to listen to each other? It seems to be wholeheartedly necessary to solve our problems together, together. If we are going to survive any 'new incredible adventures', we need to consider this next, hugely-important screenplay as currently unwritten until it is re-written together.

The personal and subjective views presented above are served as conversation starters, but emerge from lived experience and reflections on being a single, remote parent to both a younger daughter and an older step-daughter, my own heterosexual relationships, as well as many non-sexual female friendships. The cultural references will be also understood and appreciated by those who are close to my experience of family, or watched James Bond movies as they grew up as a child, adolescent, adult etc. I still live in a Finnish, Nordic imaginary, a society which not only has a non-gendered language (Finnish has no male or female words, no words for 'he' or 'she', but one, 'hän' which is only understood with contextual reference). Arguably this fundamental way of describing people promotes gender-equality as a key value in society, even if the reality often is not as good as what is on the silver- or LCD screens that we view, or political platforms presented. There is still lots to re-think, re-imagine, to own one’s thoughts, feels, angers, calms, and then do. Not-yet-become, as Ernst Bloch may say, we carry on with a principle of hope, when en-folded again among others. To get out of such a relational mess, we need to stay with this trouble, as Donna Harraway suggests..

While there is some value in discussing men's issues with men, I am against this gender seperation of issues. Erwin Schrödinger dubbed entanglement in quantum physics to recognise that once interacted with each other, two particles cannot be described seperately, and links ghost across time and space. Surely we have to listen to each other? It seems to be wholely necessary to solve our problems together, together. If we are going to survive any 'new incredible adventures', we need to consider this first. From [where we are at] With Love (2020-)..

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*Admittedly the recent portrayal of the fictional James Bond from the mid-2000s, almost 50 years later, has gained complexity and darkness, with the screenplays, and particularly the acting of Daniel Craig, lauded for questioning the emotional callousness and misogyny of the James Bond character. Indeed ‘Skyfall’ (2012) revealing dropped this actor and the Bond character in his fictional Glencoe home for a dramatic finale.

Media reference:

Original Trailer for Terence Young’s ‘From Russia With Love’ film (1962), starring Sean Connery as Agent 007 James Bond, Accessible from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7hWreVysyt8

Essay also published here: https://www.facebook.com/agryfp/posts/10157974427543343